

Letter to the Editor: Protecting Healthcare Workers From COVID-19 and the Assaulting Society: Indian Perspective



Nileswar Das^{1*} , Priyanka Mishra²

1. Department of Psychiatry and NDDTC, AIIMS, New Delhi, India.
2. Department of Ophthalmology, RPC, AIIMS, New Delhi, India.

*** Corresponding Author:**

Nileswar Das, MD.

Address: Department of Psychiatry and NDDTC, AIIMS, New Delhi, India.

Phone: +91 (97) 34461136

E-mail: dr.nileswar@gmail.com



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ABSTRACT

The novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic has created a massive burden on Healthcare Workers (HCWs). Working in a potentially infectious environment, HCWs are at higher risk of physical and psychological illnesses. However, providing adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is necessary to protect HCWs from rising violence in the community due to fear, frustration, and stigma. The authors highlighted this important yet relatively underresearched entity of public behavior that demands further studies in the future.

Dear Editor

Since its beginning in December 2019, (till May 15, 2020) 4.4 million confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) have been reported worldwide with a case fatality rate of (approximately) 5% [1]. The world is now facing the toughest health crisis of this century. From the socioeconomic perspec-

tive in many ways, all subgroups of the population are in danger, but the Healthcare Workers (HCWs) appear to be the hardest hit [2]. For instance, Dr Li Wenliang (China), an ophthalmologist at the Wuhan General Hospital, faced opposition from authorities, and later on, he died from the same illness after treating patients of COVID-19 admitted in Intensive Care Unit (ICU) [3]. Likewise, many HCWs have encountered a similar fate as the estimated rate of infection among HCWs is high (up to 10% as per

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Table 1. News reports highlighting rising violence against healthcare workers during COVID-19 in India (Till May 15, 2020)

Date	News Article Source	Place of Incident(s)	Incident/ News Headline(s)	Comment
04.02.2020	Hindustan times	Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India	"Health team (of three members) pelted with stones during COVID-19 screening drive in Indore"	Misinformation is allegedly the source of outrage; four offenders have been arrested.
04.06.2020	The Indian express	Surat, Gujrat, India	"A 34-year-old female psychiatrist was mobbed by the neighbors, alleging her to spread infection"	Stigma plays a role, the offenders have been arrested.
04.09.2020	The wire	New Delhi, NCT*, India	"A 42-year-old man has allegedly accused two female resident doctors at Safdarjung Hospital of spreading coronavirus and assaulted them"	Stigma plays a role in this incident; the man has been arrested.
04.09.2020	The wire	Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India	"Two postgraduate residents from the AIIMS [†] Bhopal were assaulted by police officials, as they were on their way back home from the hospital"	Stigma and miscommunication playing a role in this incident; under investigation
04.12.2020	The economic times	New Delhi, NCT*, India	"A 36-year-old pregnant nurse was harassed by the neighbors"	Stigma plays a role, no complaint lodged.
04.15.2020	India today	Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India	"A team of doctors and medical staff was attacked by a mob when they went to take away two suspected cases of the novel coronavirus in the area".	Misinformation, fear, and stigma; under investigation
04.20.2020	India today	Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India	"Chennai: Neurosurgeon dies of COVID-19, mob attacks hearse, tries to stop burial"	Misinformation and stigma playing a role, Chennai police have arrested 20 people for the same.

[†] AIIMS – All India Institute of Medical Sciences; * NCT – National Capital Territory

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WHO) as well as the case fatality [4]. Across the world, the problems for all HCW looked similar: the lack of medical equipment(s) that force HCWs to choose among patients with best chances of survival, lack of personal protective gears that expose thousands of HCWs to the deadly virus, very long work hours that endangers the psychological wellbeing of all frontline HCWs, and experiencing the psychological trauma of losing co-workers or relatives [5] In India, however, HCWs are facing a unique threat from the very society they are trying to save. On many occasions over the last decade or so, the South-East Asian country has seen violence against healthcare providers [6]. Even now, there have been several reported incidents of physical and psychological abuse from fellow citizens—while serving them in testing, isolation, or treatment facilities of COVID-19 (Table 1). In some instances, HCWs have been forced to vacate their home by the neighbors and landlords or denied cremation (who died after serving COVID-19 patients) out of fear, frustration, and stigma [7]. Most researchers believe that presently, health-care workers are every country's most valuable resource [8]. It appears that the fellow Indians have failed to recognize the fact.

Further studies are needed to assess the possible reasons for such population behavior, how to address such issues and the psychological impact of violence on HCWs. But more importantly, we need to intervene. The mental healthcare professionals need to step-up, to provide due psychological first aid and preparedness to the frontline HCWs as well as the suffering patients and the grieving families to curtail such incidents in the future. However, at the same time, the government has to ensure the security and safety of every HCW. In the end, this is a fight against an invisible enemy and if we let ourselves be nervous, then what would happen to the people [3]. Only together we can fight this battle, and together we will.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

There were no ethical considerations to be considered in this research.

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Authors' contributions

Both authors were equally contributed in preparing this article.

Conflict of interest

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